

Interview with Jessie Mae Finley

Interview #: SAA-A-D-2003-003

Interview # 01: November 15, 2003

Interviewer: Naarah Patton

Patton: This is Naarah Patton, interviewing Mrs. Jessie Mae Finley on November 15th, 2003. Right now she's going to tell me a little bit about some of her family history.

Finley: I'm so glad you came, cause I like to talk about my family. I have quite a nice family. I have them organized, and set up for scholarships. And we have big reunions every two years. It's quite a family, you know. Well anyhow, to my left, is my mother and my father, James Schultz and Elizabeth Schultz. Well, this picture over here is a picture of me when I was thirty-nine, and my two children, who are now seventy-one and seventy-two. And I am ninety-six. The first picture you're seeing here is my mother's mother. Her father was an Irishman, and her mother was mostly Indian. And the next picture is a picture of my late husband, and our wedding. That's Mr. Finley and Jessie Mae Finley. This picture here is a picture of my first husband, Dr. A.H. Kenniebrew. When I was in high school I wrote a book about him, being the first Negro to own and operate his own hospital, which was in Jacksonville, Illinois. And I had no idea at that time that I'd ever meet him, that I would work for him, marry him, and he would be the father of my children. Quite a story; a big story. Now, some of these pictures I'll skip across, because I don't know all

of them. I do know them, but... This one here, now that's my mother's mother. I told you about her. Her father was an Irishman. And this was my father's mother and father, Julia Schultz and George Schultz, in Kentucky. He was brought over here as a slave, and had – was given some property in Kentucky, where he raised his children. That's a whole story about that. My daughter – here's my daughter right here – has done a big book on our family. It's called *George Schultz and His*. And there's a copy of it at the Lincoln Library. You should go there and ask for it, and you'll find out a whole lot about my family, taken all the way back from him, and all the way back from her. Now, Dr. Kenniebrew and I had two children. We had a daughter, and that was Charlotte. And we had a son, who is right here. Here he is with his second wife, and his newborn youngster. In his old age, he got a young girl. He had two children by his first marriage. He was supposed to be a doctor. He was at Carthage, Illinois, and he was deferred from the medical school that had accepted him. And he was deferred to go to the medical school. But he had done so much athletic work, and boxing and football, and everything. He lettered in everything. In fact, he put Carthage on the map. He's in the Hall of Fame at Carthage at the present time. And so he was the one supposed to be the doctor. And then when he came back from... He said, "I'm going into the service, mother, and getting my time over with, because I can't apply myself to medical school right now." Well that upset me

a lot, but anyhow, I had to accept it. So anyhow, he went over there. And when he came back, he came back Far East champion boxer, and everything like that in the boxing world, and Far East football player, and everything. And instead of them putting him in the medical corps, they put him in the activities and things like that, where he went from place to place, playing and boxing. But when he got home, he was so tired. My daughter said to me, "Alonzo's on his way home. I'm going to let you know that he's coming back as the Far East champion," and so forth and so on. Well anyhow, he got here, and he didn't want to go into medical school. He said he was too tired. So he said, "I'm going to the University of Illinois and get my master's in bacteriology. And then I will go." Well, he did not finish it. He kind of got [unclear]. And he was looking for some work, and so Northwestern University scouted him to work in their immunology department. So he went to work for them. Then he went to work for the director at C.D. Research Laboratory in Chicago. And there he met a young lady, and they married, and had some nursing homes. But I told you all of that to know that I did not get him for a doctor, but I got one of his daughters for a doctor. This is his daughter. Her name is Bridget, Bridget Steele. Bridget Kenniebrew Steele. And that's her husband, who is a construction engineer. She's in charge of internal medicine at the Loyola University Hospital. And this is my daughter. Her husband was vice president of General Mills

Corporation for thirty years (Editor's Note: Vice president of General Mills for 19 years and Illinois Bell for 13 years). And he retired. And she taught school while he was there. And they have – this is their two girls here. Most of my kids – my parents started out by telling us you had to try to be somebody. And Dr. Kenniebrew was a person that, you had to be somebody or he didn't want anything to do with you. You know. So, nearly all of them have finished up their work in college, and have good jobs, and doing well. My daughter is now – and I'll tell you about her because she is a Springfieldian. And see, this child here was born in Springfield. So that's – there's some of these Springfield people. And she is now on the library board for Madison County. And she's also on the State Board [of the] Historical Society. So that's a little bit about Charlotte. She did a big exhibit in Madison County on the early settlers, and early Afro-American settlers in Madison County. And it's so good, that they're going to have it on display at the State Library here in February. So if you see that, you'll see what she's done on that. She's very artistic. This little picture over here is a picture of some of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I had five children. I had five daughters, and I have four great-granddaughters. In that picture there you'll see four of my great-grandsons, I think. So I have quite a nice little family. (laughs) That's something, I'm just so proud of my family, I'm telling you. And I didn't know if you wanted to know something about them or not.

Patton: No, that was good.

Finley: Did you?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: Well now, so many people ask me why – you’re ninety-six, where are your wrinkles? You know? And I said, “I have some. But I really don’t have very many of them.” And they will say, “How do you do it?” And I said, “Well, one of my grandfathers was an Irishman, one was an African. And both grandmothers were mostly Indian, and African and what not.” So I said, “With the combination, I think, you don’t have room for wrinkles.” (laughs) So, they get a kick out of that when I tell them. And of course, my sixty years doing the work that the Lord wants me to do. I’m what you call a devout Christian, and I am doing the work that the Lord wants me to do. So he has guided me all these ninety-six years, and I think he is still guiding me. Now, I do have some books here. I have one anniversary book of our church, which is a hundred and sixty-five years old.

Patton: Can you get that?

Finley: We’ll take them downstairs. Right there. All of those things I think you might like to see. It’s a hundred and sixty-five years, the church. And it tells you all about the church, and I’ll tell you more about all of

those things when we get downstairs. Now, do you want to take these things with you? Or are you going to...

[brief pause in interview]

Finley: We just had our twenty-seventh annual concert, the Jessie Mae Finley Scholarship Concert in Springfield. And this is an organization I started twenty-seven years ago, to help people that were interested in music. It was to promote music, musicians and music education. We have a concert every year. And this is me. Here I am, right here in the picture. And this tells a little something about me here. It says that, “Jessie Mae Finley founded the Voices of Love, Joy and Peace in December 1976. Mrs. Finley has dedicated her life to music, and the promotion of music education. In 1977 the members of the Voices established the Jessie Mae Finley Scholarship Fund to honor Mrs. Finley for her more than fifty-five years, spent promoting musicians and music education, her contributions to the group and to the entire Springfield community. Throughout the years, she has received many awards. Mrs. Finley was recipient of the Copley Award in 1976, as first citizen of Springfield, and winner of the mayor’s awards in the arts. She has also – was inducted into the Senior Illinois Hall of Fame in 1994. She has received...” I received many other awards. And you know, I have a whole stack of them. (laughs) You know, I worked for the state for fifty years. And when I retired, I decided I don’t know

what [unclear]. I went to all the organizations that I can get into, to show them – people – that it can be done. [unclear] people that you can't do this, and they don't want you here, and they don't want you here. And I said, "I'm going to prove that it can be done." So I'll show you the list of organizations that I went into in order to work, and show that it can be done. I think it [unclear]. I don't know where that is. [unclear] I'll come to that. [reading] "A descendant of grandparents who were slaves." They were not slaves. My grandfather was a slave – my father's father in Kentucky. [reading] "Mrs. Finley has spent her life in Illinois, contributing much of her time to volunteer service in counseling, tutoring, entertaining, representing, and contributing financially to others; many of whom are too old, too young, too weak, and otherwise incapable to help somebody themselves." Now this is what somebody else wrote. Since [unclear] who are we talking about? You know. (laughs) And they said, "We are proud to be sharing this very special event with her today. We love her, and we are grateful that she has touched our lives in so many different ways." Now this book you can keep. I don't think we'll need to refer to that again.

Patton: Thank you.

Finley: This is a nomination form that was sent in to the Illinois State for the Hall of Fame. But I don't know how much... unless you want me to

read that. I'll tell you a little bit about it, and then... I don't know if I should give you – can you make a copy of this, and get it back to me?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: Well, it says here that, “Mrs. Finley has worked on a farm, peddling milk, butter and food from the garden in Danville, Illinois.” That’s where I was born and raised. “From the age of nine she did part-time work in the field of music, as pianist and organist, choral director.” That’s when I used to sing for the municipal band. And I had my own music studio for a while. And I sold various books, such as *The Achievements of a Colored Man in American History*. Something like you’re doing now, you know. That was by Dubois. For our school money. “Jessie Mae Finley worked for Dr. A.H. Kenniebrew, surgeon and owner of the New Home Sanitarium in Jacksonville, Illinois from 1925 to his death in 1943.” Now that’s a misprint, because I worked there until 1928. He passed away in 1943. “She was a medical stenographer, office nurse, hospital superintendent, analyst for the Capital Indemnity Insurance Company for which Dr. Kenniebrew was the founder and publisher.” And let’s see now. You see, I have it organized. Lieutenant Governor’s Senior’s Action Center, where I worked for – to counsel people all over the state of Illinois. I first retired – I have to tell you this. When I went to work for the state, they had nothing for our women except a restroom and the elevators. I

couldn't get anything in the office at all. So I finally – after a big fat fight, I was able to get into an office, and get an office job. And I worked there until – I worked myself up to the place where I was supervising a group of people in an upper income bracket. Some were making much more money than me, because of their seniority and whatnot. But it was a hard job. It was rough. So, anyhow, I decided that I was tired, and I couldn't – I had made my point, and everybody still didn't understand what I was trying to do. And so I decided to stop and take myself a little trip. So I went to the Holy Land, to Rome, Israel, Greece and Cyprus – over all those places over there. About fifteen days it was. I've done quite a lot of traveling. I like to travel. If something came up I wanted to do, I'd just grab my Visa card, and go. You know. I did all this while I was still working. And so I took a trip to the Holy Land. And when I came back, when I stepped in the door at the office there, all of this material things that I had tried to fight and protect us for, and make them understand – I had no desire to hurt anybody, or do anything at all, it was just to make them understand – people understand – hit me in the face, and something said, You've done – you've made your point and you've done enough, and you should retire. So I went to my office and asked the man if I could retire that day. That was very unusual you know. No, I don't want to go back to my desk either. Just retire today. So they arranged for me to retire. And so...

Patton: What year was this?

Finley: 1972, I think. I'm sure it was '72. And so I – I got to thinking: I said, I have to work. I can make some more money. I need it. No need to sit around. So anyhow, I started, doing what you call, volunteer work. And when they heard about me doing stuff, the volunteer work, they wanted me to help set up this toll free line in the lieutenant governor's office, where I counseled with people all over the state of Illinois. I did that for eight... I thought I was through. But anyhow. That was after thirty-five years. And so, then I took an – I told you about it – helped them set it up, and was there for eighteen years, making fifty years altogether, in the state of Illinois. And so then I retired in 1991 from there. But I did an awful lot of work on the side. I was doing a lot of work on the side, ministry work in different hospitals and nursing homes, and whatnot. And I still enjoy doing a lot of things for people. That was my business. People are my business. So, anyhow, I did a lot of that. I had a lot of stories about that, that I could give you, but I don't even know them all – I've had to solve many, many problems for people. And I enjoyed it. I'll tell you one or two. One man from Chicago called me. He said he was going to commit suicide. He was ready to jump out the window. And I said, "No, you're not going to do that." And he said, "How do you know?" I said, "I'm not going to let you." I said, "You just listen to me. I'm not going to let you jump out that window." And he said, "How are

you going to keep me from it?” I said, “You just stay there by that telephone, and I’ll take care of it for you.” And give me the telephone number, and give me the caseworker that you want back, and what you’re fighting for, and everything. And I’ll take care of it.” So I called the Suicide Intervention, to tell them to get over there right away and try to help him. So they did. And whether he was telling me the truth or not – he did not commit suicide. But he really was so happy that I did. And he was so glad to talk to me, and tell me how much he appreciated it, and so forth. I had a lot of cases like that. And but that’s another one here in Springfield: a lady came to our office, running through the office, to go out and run in front of a car, and commit suicide. I said, “No, you aren’t going to do it.” And she said, “I’m not going to listen.” I said, “Wait just a minute.” And so I went over and put my arms around her, and I said, “Now, I want you to come with me; we’re going down here to McDonald’s. We’re going to have a hamburger and a cold drink.” And I said, “And then we’ll talk about this.” Well she got quieted down bless her heart. I sort of befriended her for about twenty-five or thirty years, you know. But anyhow, those are some of the cases that I had. And I had to help many people in solving... A dear lady told me that someone had endorsed her check, and cashed it, and so forth, and so on; and she didn’t know what in the world was wrong. And she came to me, and I took her to the bank. And I said, “This is not her signature.” And he

said, “How did it happen that you cashed it, when someone else signed it?” They said, “How do you know it’s not her signature?” And I said, “Well I have her signature on some of our papers at the office.” She showed me her signature on the checks. And her name was Katherine, or something. And I said, “Her H went this way, and this H is going here.” And I said, “And that’s the way I tell you that it’s not her signature.” And they argued about it, and I said, “If we have a handwriting expert, would you accept it?” I said, if he says it’s her signature, I’ll accept it. But I’m not going to accept it, otherwise. And so I finally – I went through a whole lot of things with her, to prove to them that that was not her signature. And so, one day I went to them and told them; I said, “We’re going to have to have her down here today. Katherine has to have more money, and she needs it. And you cashed her check, and it should have not have been cashed.” And they said, “Well, you tell her to go the treasurer’s office, and they’ll give her a check.” (laughs) So I called her, and I said, “Will you come down here?” And I said, “Now you go and see, and everything like that, and get your check.” And then take a taxi. Take the taxi down here. And you won’t have anybody following you. You’ll take the taxi back home. I have had so many things, I could write a book on the stories that I have. Now this here tells about – this book here tells really my history. And I told you that I... This is a listing of different organizations that I went into, to prove that it – that was my motto: It

can be done. It can be done. And I worked in nearly all of these – I worked in all of them. I was a part of all of them. It'll tell you when you read it. Now is this something you want to look at?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: Well, you can have that.

Patton: Thank you.

Finley: See, and on the back – the back page... That's a little something I didn't put down there, down at the bottom. You write with your pencil. This is for leisure time activities, I guess you would say. Or hobbies. My biggest hobby was traveling. I made a trip to Hawaii. And the Holy Land, Rome, Israel, Cyprus, Egypt and Greece. And I went to – that was the Bermuda Islands. I belonged to Norman Vincent Peale's Foundation for Christian Living. I knew I was a member of that. I don't know if that's on there or not.

Patton: Could you repeat that, please? Could you repeat the name?

Finley: Norman Vincent Peale. He was a great man that taught... Let's see, what was it? I can't think of what he did now, but anyhow. Each year he had a big reunion for people who belonged to his organization. So I traveled with him next to Bermuda. You can just say I traveled to Bermuda Islands with Norman Vincent Peale and his foundation. And

also, I travel out to the Bahamas twice with his foundation. And I had a cruise to Puerto Rico, and the islands. And I had – in fact, let me see now – I don't know I was in Canada and Mexico. So that shows – all these things that I did, and I've traveled a lot. I enjoy traveling. And it caught fire with my children, and also with my nieces and nephews. I have about – I told you about children, and my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren. And I have about two hundred nieces and nephews. (laughs) Isn't that something?

Patton: That is.

Finley: Well, both of my parents were married twice. And there were children in each family. And they – I have to put some of this in there, about my mother and father. My mother married my father's brother in Kentucky. And they had one child. He and his family – he had five children – and she nursed all five of those children through TB in Kentucky, where it was widespread. And was nursing them until they passed away. She was just a youngster. And he – my father married my mother's niece. And they had five children. So, anyhow, before he died – before my mother's first husband died, he called his niece – his wife had died from TB too – so he called, and went to the bedside of my mother's first husband, which was his brother. And he said, "Hollis, so-and-so is now dead," – the first husband and wife, and Claudie is dead. "And you need somebody." And he said, "I'm going

to give..." He said, "I know you're not going to make it, but I'm going to give..." Hollis said – my mother's first – "I'm going to give Betty to you." He said, "I know you like her, and you always did. And if you don't, you'd better be good to her." So, there's a brother gave her to my father. They had five children. So you see, with all of those, I have about two hundred nieces and nephews, greats, and great-greats.(laughs). What a life. It's quite a story. We have a big reunion every two years, and we're organized. And we go different places. So, going back to my traveling; I've traveled in the United States here, in many states. And the leisure time activity would be gardening. My second husband built us a home on the hillside right here in Springfield, with an acre of land. And he had – before I even married him, he always wanted to build a house. So he built us a home. He was an architect, and so he decided to build this home. And he called the place Finley's Little Acre, because it wasn't quite an acre. So Finley's Little Acre still stands. And we had some good times there. We had all kinds of things: picnics and barbeques, and everything else you could think of – ice cream socials for kids, and all like that. It was just really great. We enjoyed it so much that, you know, when he passed away my children said, "Mama, you cannot take care of this." They said, "We have to find a place for you." So, they told me when to sit down and when to get up. And I landed at Lincoln Tower, where I lived for ten years. Then the doctor said, "You need a little extra

care.” So I went to Oak Terrace. And I was there for three years, and I fell and broke my shoulder. And I thought I was done for. I didn’t know breaking my shoulder would do such – you know, knock you out completely. So, I landed here at this place. And it’s – I’ve been to a lot of nursing homes, from doing the ministry work, and I would say this is about the nicest place that I’ve been in. And there are naturally some things about it I’m trying to change, whether I can do it or not... (laughs) Anyhow, things seem to be working pretty well for me. And I tell them all the time that the light of God surrounds me, the love of God enables me, the power of God protects me. The presence of God oversees me. So that means wherever I am, God is. So therefore, I have no fear. Because I know He’s watching over me. He has for ninety-six years, and He is still doing it. I got off track, didn’t I?

Patton: No, that was fine. That was great.

Finley: Well now, going back to the travels. Where else have I traveled? No, no. My leisure time activities. Shooting and showing slides. I shot slides from all those trips that I had, and I had boxes and boxes of slides. I still have them. But people are not interested much in slides now. I did show them in the city here, to various organizations and churches, and clubs and everything. And I still have those slides. And my daughter has all that. She’s keeping it for me. I think that’s about all. I did a lot of different things, but that’s the main things I did.

Now let's see, what do we want to see? You might find some other leisure time activities in that article there. This is another thing here.

It's a little earlier resume that I had, I'm going to give you. What date is that?

Patton: October 1985. And then it's updated. It says here 1989.

Finley: Well this is earlier. No, that's when I retired. Those are three resumes that tell you all about me. So, about me going through that – you know, the oral history part of that. Unless you want me to. And I would like you to make copies of those, and get them back to me.

Patton: Yes, okay. Lot of questions here too than we can ask.

Finley: Huh?

Patton: I have a lot of questions here too that I can ask you.

Finley: Now, this is the Copley First Citizen Award, which you can keep. And it shows all the people that – the recipients. You see? Jessie Mae Finley, right there. Well, nearly all the rest of them are gone on to glory – those with the asterisks. Just look at that. Just look this over.

Patton: Thank you.

Finley: And then, I was honored just recently by the RSVP, which is the Retired Senior Citizen Volunteer Program. And they chose people of

different years and service, and I'm the only one that has the thirty. So I was honored for my thirty years with them. Volunteer work, you can put that over there. I'd like to have that back.

Patton: Okay.

Finley: You can keep the copy of this. Put it over there I would like to have that back. Now this is a picture of my church. A hundred and sixty-five years celebration. And I am the musician emeritus there, and also I'm the historian emeritus of the church. They have a picture on – the people on that, serving for this and that, and the other, you know. I'm going to give this to you so you can look it over. And also, about the church. And let's see. This is I write-up I gave. It tells a little about me there. Will that help you?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: Now you can keep this one. I promote a lot of different things, and one of them is a family organization. And this is a book of our fifteenth family reunion. We have them every two years. This tells you a little bit about the family reunion. But this year it was in Las Vegas, and this year I could not go. But I received this from the president, and this is greetings from me. You can keep that. You can have that.

Patton: Thank you.

Finley: Will that help you? Hope so. I would be over-I would be over...
Now, Dr. Kenniebrew: everybody wants to know why in the world I would marry a man thirty years older than me. This tells a little bit – all about Dr. Kenniebrew here. Black History Dr. Alonzo Kenniebrew. And you can keep this. There he is at a desk. He went to Jacksonville in 1905. He's in the Hall of Fame there at Jacksonville now. And they also have – this monument for him, for his services at Jacksonville. We were there for the honoring of that. And you can keep this, and it might help you some. You can keep this. And also, if you want to, you can check the Internet, the story of his accomplishments is on the Internet. And also – and I'll go back and tell you why I married a man thirty years older than me. Did I tell you that I wrote about him when I was young? I didn't know that I'd be meeting him, and marry him, and he'd be the father of my children. He had a stroke, and had to give his hospital up. And so he wanted to open up an office here in Springfield. And he wanted to know if I would go to Springfield and help him open this office up, and also – and one of the nurses he wanted to go and take with him. And I just sort of proposed to him, and I said, "I'm not going with you anyplace unless we're married." So we were married in 1930. And he was thirty years older than me. And he lived – they said he would have another stroke and die most any time. But he lived– after we were married, he lived – I guess the children added to his life. You know. I

was married in 1930, he died in '43. That was thirteen years. He had a nice time with the kids, and they had a nice time. They knew him. This tells all about him there. And he was from Tuskegee Institute, and was a private physician for Dr. Booker T. Washington. And he had – you know, his best friend was George Washington Carver – I guess you've heard about him, and the peanuts and everything. I went with him to the fiftieth anniversary of Tuskegee. I enjoyed it so much. I found out a whole lot about the place. And it was exciting then to know that I could drive all across the country. I think about my kids now, how they drive all across the country. And I go all the way from Springfield to Tuskegee Institute and back. And he wanted to go, and I wanted to go too. So I had a chance to visit with George Washington Carver, and some of the other old people like that. It was a really historical thing. I've had some great experiences honey. And I'll see if I've got anything else here. Maybe something on Love, Joy and Peace. (pauses) And I was going to add some other things here. I belong to the YWCA. And this is the awards dinner they have each year. And this booklet here tells all about former – I think the former members. I have carpal tunnel in my hands, and I don't handle too well. This is the nineteen nominees, and so forth, and congratulations. And I recommended – nominated Naomi Ross. That was my nominee. You can keep this. Then you can see the sort of thing that they do there. And I've been a member of the YWCA for a long time – since

my daughter was a youngster, and that would be back in the '30s. And these are people who – but Naomi is the one you'd be interested. Naomi Ross is a nurse, is the wife of Dr. Donald Ross, who is an outstanding oncologist here in Springfield. And in fact, he is supposed to be one of the best there is. And they have sort of taken me in as family. So I am very close to them. But you might learn something about Naomi, and also about women in. Now if you can get some other information from the YWCA, you'll get – you'll find a lot about women here, that have been accepted for this. And I guess – I thought they had missed a few people. There's a listing on there of other people. Is there another listing of the former nominees? Some of my very good friends were nominated.

End Tape 1, Side A; Begin Tape 1, Side B

Finley: ...interested in history when she retired from school teaching. And she was born and went to school here, so she's one of Springfield's people. This is a former picture. The black history exhibit they'll be bringing here for the state library. This is part of her exhibit showing here, of the early Afro-Americans in Madison County. So I don't know I just want you to see the sort of thing that she's doing. Does that help you with anything, knowing about that? Well, I'll let you

have this one. Let's see. Her exhibit will be here in February. So I would like for...

Patton: Do you know which building?

Finley: Huh?

Patton: Do you know which building that will be at?

Finley: It would be in the main area, I think. What do they call the main area of the library over there? Something. There's a name it has.

Patton: Yes.

Finley: It's on the main floor. That's not in here now. They just got word about that they had accepted it. But I wanted you to see this so you could see the kind of work that she does. Now, this – you don't need this, I don't think – because this all about Madison County here. But I just wanted you to see the kind of work that she's doing in Madison County. There she is. Who is this here? Friend of slaves – who is that who was a friend of the slaves? Coles. A fellow named Coles?

Patton: Edward Coles?

Finley: That's right. She did research on him. Does that interest you? Well, here we are.

Patton: Thank you, ma'am.

Finley: And this is – here's another picture of the African-American – she did a documentary recently on the Underground Railroad. She doesn't like to show this because it's such a terrible picture of her. She said that the guy took one picture after another, and then he put the worst one in the paper. She did this one on – on what is this here now? What does that say?

Patton: Site recognized as part of Underground Railroad.

Finley: And what's the name of the place? What is the site?

Patton: Boy Scout camp...

Finley: They had a Boy Scout camp before what is it? What's the name of the place?

Patton: It says it's in the Rocky Fork area.

Finley: Yes, that's right. Rocky Fork is where our Secretary of State was born. (Editor Note: Jesse White was born in Alton, IL NOT Rocky Fork) What's his name?

Patton: Jesse White.

Finley: Um-hmm. And so, that's one reason they want the exhibit here, because there's so many people that came from down in there. You know. Does that interest you?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: She did a documentary on this. And there were at that time six, that were accepted in Illinois— I think by the Department of the Interior, in Washington, D.C. And hers was one. So, do you want a little more about that? That wouldn't interest you, would it?

Patton: I don't know.

Finley: Let me see what this says. The fact that so many people in Springfield came from there. Place of history. Camp recognized stop on railroad. I guess it's something... I'll put all these things in this thing, and you can return it to me, just like they are.

Patton: Okay.

Finley: Cause I know that you'll do that. This telling about black history. Well, you see the kind of things she does. So she took after her mama. (laughs) Put all these back in there. Just about her. Just put her things back in here. That's Zion Baptist Church, the one that's a hundred ninety-five years old. It has more history about the church, and also about African-Americans in Springfield, than anyplace else – any other church any other place. I had-I was getting to be in pretty good condition. And the note there where you said the things I like to do, put on the back of that, collecting and cataloging Afro-American history. I collect – I mean, I have so much history on the church, and

also that. And that tells you about the things that I like to do. And my daughter and my son just talked to me this morning, and he said there was an article in – this is about Springfield people now – and there's an article in it – I have to go back to Zion Baptist Church. If, after you look at some of this, you would want to go to Zion and see what they have, I will – if I feel able, I would take you over there. Because we have more [unclear]. I have – everything is pretty well cataloged, so you could tell exactly what's going on. But I took sick [and] I had to give it up. And I haven't been able to get anybody at all that would take it over. If I could just get somebody like you. I'd love to give it to you, so you can go over there as an intern, or something.

Patton: Oh, I would love to.

Finley: I would take you over and show you, so you can see it, and you'll see what's happened. I have it organized where there's a file for past presidents – I mean past pastors. And their pastorates, in the church – years of the church. And then I had a place for outstanding people in Springfield, and a place for the organizations in Springfield; there is a file for that. And then, there's a file for a number of different things. After you see the – the – and on-line we have for them (?). You'll see what I was trying to do, but I didn't get it finished like I wanted. So, if you have time some times, I could arrange it. And if I feel like it, I say I'll go with you.

Patton: Okay.

Finley: Okay? And then you'd be surprised to know that I did several exhibits, I think, at the State Library, and also the Lincoln Library, and also Sangamon State University Library – exhibits that I had. And they all said that I had more material than they had, and they wanted to make copies. (laughs) I said, "Sure, you can make copies." So anyhow, they did that. I had a big exhibit at our church one time. I was showing everything that at Zion from the beginning to the end. And I have a videotape on that. My daughter says... How much time do you have to work on this?

Patton: As long as we need to, is how long I can focus on this.

Finley: Well, if I can get that videotape together, maybe we could show it, so you could see – you know, see it right from the beginning to the end sometime. I don't know how we're going to do all of that. But I – (laughs) – my son said, "please, Mama, whatever you do, don't overdo it." I said, "You know, I'm good for overdoing. So don't worry about me." I said, "I expect the good Lord himself will take care of me." What was the other thing I was going to take you back to – about the church, I think. It might even come to me. I belong to some other organizations that I told you. There's a copy there. And the Retired Senior Citizen Program. And I'm a member of this organization. My husband helped organize this. I mean Theo Finley.

And this tells all about them, the work of the Frontiers International. I don't know how much you want from this community or not. How much do you want about the community?

Patton: Oh, a lot.

Finley: Huh?

Patton: A lot.

Finley: Oh. Well, this group is still going strong. They have a big Martin Luther King breakfast every year. You can take this newspaper article on it. And you can keep that. You don't have to worry about that. And let's see, what else did I have that was – that would interest you. I got the YWCA, and I got that. And since you see all of the groups there that I belonged to, and that I did work with, to prove that it can be done. So, you put my mottoes on the back now, I guess. And one is: "It can be done." Make that it, capital I-T. Okay? And the results beat all arguments. And "do all you can, in as many ways as you can, for as many people as you can, while you can." And then touch somebody's life with your love joy and peace, it's not far, if you pass them. "Reach out and love and touch somebody. You'll be surprised how soon that touch will come back." That's the theme song of the Love, Joy and Peace. Actually I should have brought a copy of the song for you, but I don't have it. And one other one. "You cannot

know what love is really all about until you give it away.” You can write them on the back of that paper if you want to. Write on the back. I usually – when I make speeches, I usually try to make something to [cause] laughter – because I say that laughing is better than a tranquilizer, because it does not cost anything, and it has no side effects. Now, another one is for a speech, to get people to laugh, is my husband said on the way home one day from a place where I had made a speech, “Why do you have to talk so long?” And I said, “Honey, I forgot my watch.” And he said, “You did not need a watch. There was a calendar on the wall.” (laughs) That makes everybody laugh a little bit. (laughs) Then I tell my senior citizens – this is one thing I had for them: “If you can’t make it, if you feel you can’t make it, just fake it, and you’ll soon be able to make it.” I have a lot of stuff like that, that I – but I no longer have it – I thought I had notes on it, but I don’t have it. And that’s enough of that though. (laughs) Now, what do you want to ask me?

Patton: Let’s start with your family background. Where was your father born?

Finley: Let’s see. My father was born in OhioCounty, Kentucky.

Patton: Okay. Where was your mother born?

Finley: Same place. In Kentucky.

Patton: What type of work did your parents do when they were younger?

Finley: My mother was just a housewife, with all the kids that she had to take care of, and everything. And she – she just worked at home. And she worked very hard there. And later on when we were in Danville, and father had a little farm, she worked on the farm. She worked very, very hard. Let's see now, what else was I going to say there? My father was – I told you about how they got married. My father was a fiddler. And he was a coal miner. He worked in a coal mine. And he fiddled at night, and he'd work in the coal mine. And at night he fiddled for dances, and things like that, in Kentucky. He and his family were – they founded the Kentucky Blue Grass Music. Anyhow, he could play anything under the sun in the key of D major. Hear anything, and play it on his fiddle. I later tried to teach him notes, and it just upset him completely. But anyhow, to go back to his – in Kentucky, they were in a place called Taylor Mines. And so mother told him, she said, "Jim, you will have to leave this coal mine hole, and get me a place to rear my children, or I'm going to leave you." That day he got religion. He said, "[unclear]," and came out of the coal mines, and went to a place that they call Danville, Illinois. He'd heard about the coal mines up there. And there he made enough money to send for Mama and the kids. And I was born in Danville, Illinois. So I was the first one born in Danville. Anyhow, he came out of the coal mines, shouting and praising the Lord. And from that day on, what I would say, both of them were devout Christians. They

didn't have much education, but they – they used the Bible as their guide, and we all had to really walk a chalk line. Every one of us. So, going back to the fiddle: We enjoyed him. He had a fiddle, when we got back to Danville, and he played sometimes for us, and we enjoyed it. We really loved for him to play for us. And we took – that was after I was a pretty good size. So anyhow, mother would tell him what to play and what not to play. And so, she said – whenever he tried to play something that she didn't want him to play, she would say, "Jim, don't make a fool out of yourself now." And he was a good dancer. And he was a good swimmer. He was all-round – he would be really one of the tops in – if he was living now, you know. Cause he was a good swimmer, he was a good dancer, and he was – just everything, you know. Anyhow, we came home one day, and the fiddle was gone. We kids almost died. Where's that fiddle? He says, "You – " – he calls my mother Mammy; he says, "When you kids and Mammy get out of this house, I pull that fiddle out and the devil gets into my feet." And he says, "Today I traded it for a bushel of tomatoes." And we all cried. (laughs) Anyhow, when my mother passed away, we got him another fiddle, and we dared him to give it away to anybody, or sell it, or do anything else with it. And we found all the music we could, and the kids learned to play. And he and I absolutely – I couldn't teach him the notes. I tried hard. He tried. And he and I gave concerts. So, that's what happened. Now what were we talking about?

Patton: The kind of work that your parents did.

Finley: Well, [unclear]. He was a miner – coal miner. Licensed coal miner. I have a nice copy of his license. And he was a farmer. He had a little place where – we had a little of everything on it. And he did a lot of farming, raising pigs, and he had just a little of everything. Does that answer your question?

Patton: Yes.

Finley: I could give you a whole book on him, on my parents.

Patton: So, were they able to attend school at all?

Finley: They had very little education. He had one sister that taught school down there in Kentucky. And she taught, you know, the grade school – just where you learn A, B, Cs. Not many of them went to school then. But they studied hard. They studied the Bible hard. They studied other things very, very hard. And mother was a very brilliant singer. And she lived for a while with her own father – who I told you was an Irishman – when she was born, and he wanted – he begged his wife to let her come and live with them, because she was so much like the other girls in the family. And you could not tell her from a white person. So, anyhow, she was there for a while. She got a little education, got a little music background. But finally, she could not bear the fact that she had just really left her mother entirely. So she

ran off and went back to her – found her mother. That’s how she got back in the family, otherwise she would have been...Alex Tanner. Her father was Alex Tanner. And [unclear]. And I haven’t found out yet if that’s the Tanner of Illinois, or not. But it shows – as you go out to the Lincoln Tomb out here, there’s a big monument for Tanner. And it doesn’t say – he was the second governor of Illinois, or something. So I don’t know if we’re related to that Tanner, or not. But my daughter might be able to find out, and tell you. But, let’s see now: my mother was a housewife. But she loved music, and especially classical music. And she made us all study. She made me play that piano. And she made me look at the notes. She wouldn’t let you take your eyes off the notes. She said, “I’m not going to have another Jim Schultz in my family. You just read those notes, and all the people will know that you’re reading the notes.” And of course, I started out playing with her, by operating an old pump organ. And she could play – she taught us all to play, till I was nine years old, and then she sent me to a teacher. Now, let’s see. Have I answered your question?

Patton: Um-hmm.

Finley: All right.

Patton: Do you know what age your parents were when they left their own homes and started their own families?

- Finley: What – what did they do?
- Patton: When they left their parents and started their own families?
- Finley: Well, they were rather young, you know. They married young in those days. My mother was just a young girl. So I don't know.
- Patton: Okay. Do you know if your parents ever knew anybody from Springfield, or were ever in the Springfield area, ever visited anyone from Springfield, or knew anyone from around here?
- Finley: Did they live here? In 1930, it was, I was living – Dr. Kenniebrew and I were here – had an office here. And I heard that Zion Baptist Church needed a minister. Show you there that – the beginning – there were two of my – let's see. [*flipping through the pages of a book*] Trying to look. Here. Zion's first – let's start there. What's that? What's that say?
- Patton: [*reading*] Second fifty-year period.
- Finley: And in one of these you'll find a Schultz, my brother. See any Schultz?
- Patton: I thought I saw –
- Finley: Paper.
- Patton: Right here.

Finley: All right. Under there. Clyde Schultz is my brother. And Clyde Schultz, my brother; he passed away. And the other brother, they called him the pastor. He was there. So I had two Schultzes there. So then that's – you can put those – get that together on there. And my maiden name was Schultz. And they – I heard that they needed a minister at Zion Baptist Church. And I heard that Clyde Schultz had started preaching up in Ohio. And my mother was here with me at that time. And she wrote and asked him to come and see. They liked him so well. They then saw him. He had never been ordained. They ordained him and installed him the same day. He was just a young fellow, in his – about early thirties. But he died. He – I think when he died the percentage of the membership was greater probably than any other place – not that we had more members then, but it was the percentage of it. So he was trying that out. So anyhow, he did – they – both of them were there. And then the second one left, and went to Cantrall, Illinois, where he passed away, at a church there. I don't know, honey. What's the next one?

Patton: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Finley: I had – let me see, there was five. There was five siblings. And then, there were five half siblings. There were ten.

Patton: Did anyone ever live in your house with you besides your mom and dad and your brothers and sisters?

Finley: What?

Patton: Did anyone ever live in your house with you besides your mom and dad and your brother and sisters?

Finley: Yes, Mama and Papa would take anybody. They would take in anybody. They – they were great on family anybody coming, and staying until they could get on their feet. So, there were – there were some that I could [unclear] exactly how many.

Patton: Could you tell me if you were closer to your mother or your father?

Finley: Well, closer to my mother. My father worked hard in the coal mines, and the garden and things like that, things like that. And he'd had his problems with the older children. And he wasn't going to put that burden on mother. So he turned us over to her. So we had to be closer to her.

Patton: Which did your parents stress most: hard work, religion, education, or getting a career?

Finley: Which?

Patton: Hard work, religion –

Finley: What?

Patton: Which one did they think was the most important?

Finley: again.

Patton: Hard work, religion –

Finley: Religion.

Patton: Religion. Definitely?

Finley: See? Religion. That's right. You had to walk the chalk line.

Patton: Could you tell me a little bit about your childhood home?

Finley: My childhood home?

Patton: Like the neighborhood, who your neighbors were – describe it.

Finley: Well, we were – plain homes. We found a house with – just two stories. And so that there was room for the boys who worked in the coal mines upstairs, room for us downstairs. And we had a downstairs home, which was very unusual, right, at that time. And – what else do you want to know? And then we had – there was one, from her first marriage – from her first marriage, there was one that lived to come to Danville with us. And he died from TB. But before he died, he – he built a little home in back of our home, over in the field there – a lovely little place. And before he passed, he gave the home to mother and them. And then they had that home moved over on the – we came out of the two-story house, moved that home over on our house, and –

on the other street. And it was a lovely little cottage. We had – let's see: We had a kitchen, and a dining room. We had two bedrooms. And it was really a home. It was a really nice place. So we had that.

Patton: Did you have neighbors close by?

Finley: Yes, they were close. We lived on a street, that most of the people on the street were coal miners, or brickyard people. They used to call the street Brickyard Road, cause it was close to the brickyard. There were a lot of children born there. And sometimes, when my mother had a baby, and some other person had a baby, and they – it seemed that they waited to take care of each other, cause they'd wait until this one got out of the way, and then they'd have – How they did, I don't know. But, there was a friend of mine – there's three of us still living from Brickyard Road. And we've stayed in touch with each other, through all these years. And one – I lost touch with one of them. I could not find her. Where is she? Where is she? And so, a lady finally sent me a newspaper clipping from Danville, Illinois of her obituary. She had passed away. And in the obituary, it was naming the people – you know, friends and whatnot – she said she had three special friends, and one of them was Jessie Mae Finley. I said, "Lord have mercy." Wherever she was, she was thinking about me. So, her mother had her baby. And then as soon as she's on her feet, my mama had her baby. It was me. And what was the original question?

- Patton: Just describing your childhood home.
- Finley: Well, they were pretty fair homes out there. And this – our home was one of the nicer places. But, [unclear] it was country.
- Patton: How old were you when you left your parents' home, and started your own?
- Finley: Eighteen. I went to work for Dr. Kenniebrew when I was eighteen.
- Patton: Is that when you moved to Springfield?
- Finley: No, Jacksonville.
- Patton: Jacksonville. Okay.
- Finley: I worked for his hospital, [unclear]. I was working for him then.
- Patton: When you were younger, what did you plan on – what kind of career, or life, did you plan for?
- Finley: Well, I wanted to be somebody special. [unclear] told us we had to be somebody. Now, if you got too smart – you could not do it in a big way, a little way – and [unclear] how was that? Don't know – think that you have to be big [unclear] way. You had to – you had to do something [unclear] with your talents, and developing your talents, and working to your highest potential. And what was that question you asked me?

Patton: What did you want to do?

Finley: What did I want to do? Well, I wanted to do a lot of things. I wanted to be a great singer, and I wanted to be a great piano player. And I wanted to be a tutor. I taught – [unclear] tutoring. And I just wanted to do a lot of things. I had so many things I wanted to do.

Patton: Were there any specific jobs, or life paths, that your parents wanted you to take?

Finley: What?

Patton: Were there specific jobs, or careers, that your parents wanted you to go for?

Finley: Oh. Well, they thought [unclear] do something in the way of religion. They always wanted ministers in our family, so we got them – at least two ministers here. And then I had two other. [unclear] the next ones that were ministers. And so – how much more do we have now?

Patton: Are you getting tired? We can stop for today. We can continue this some other time.

Finley: Well, I am getting a little tired.

Patton: Okay, that's fine.

[END TAPE ONE.]